

Message Text

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ACTION EPA-02

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R 311924Z OCT 74
FM AMEMBASSY MEXICO
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4583

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: SENV, MX
SUBJ: PESTICIDE EPISODE IN COAHUILA, MEXICO

REF: STATE A-7085

AGATT HAS DEVELOPED FOLLOWING ACCOUNT SUBJECT EPISODE THROUGH
VARIOUS SOURCES: EPISODE OCCURRED DAILY DURING PERIOD ABOUT JULY
25-AUG 10, 1974. UP TO 1,500 WORKERS, ALL MALE, WERE APPLYING
INSECTICIDE TO COTTON CROP BY PORTABLE GASOLINE POWERED
SPRAYERS AND BY SHOULDER CARRIED ONE-MAN PUMPS. NO PROTECTIVE
CLOTHING OR MASKS WERE USED AND WORKERS GOT
SOAKING WET FROM THE SOLUTION DAY AFTER DAY AND PROBABLY DID
NOT WASH THOROUGHLY IF AT ALL AFTERWARD. NORMALLY, THIS
INSECTICIDE IS APPLIED BY USING FIXED WING AIRCRAFT BUT SINCE
PILOTS DEMANDED DOUBLE LAST SEASON'S RATES FOR FLYING, THE GOM
BANK, BANCO AGRARIO DE LA LAGUNA, WHICH FINANCES COTTON PRODUCTION
IN THE AREA, DECIDED TO IMPORT THE PORTABLE SPRAYERS FROM JAPAN AND
APPLY THE PESTICIDE BY HAND TO CUT COSTS. A BANK OFFICIAL, CARLOS
BARBOSA, MASTERMINDED THE PLAN AND HAS SINCE BEEN FIRED. A TOTAL
OF 689 CASES OF PHOSPHATE POISONING WERE REPORTED, OF WHICH 7
VICTIMS DIED AND THE REST EVENTUALLY RECOVERED. THE TWO
PESTICIDES USED WERE MEVIDRIN (PRODUCED BY SHELL) AND
METHOMYL (PRODUCED BY DUPONT). BOTH MATERIALS ARE MIXED WITH
WATER AND APPLIED TO COTTON PLANTS IN LIQUID FORM. THE WEATHER
WAS HOT AND DRY AT THE TIME OF THE EPISODE. THE BANCO AGRARIO
DE LA LAGUNA BOUGHT THE PESTICIDES AND WAS IN CHARGE
OF THE APPLICATION PROGRAM. ALL CONTAINERS CARRIED SPECIFIC IN-
STRUCTIONS FOR HANDLING AND SAFETY PRECAUTIONS, HOWEVER, DOUBT IF
ANY OF THE WORKERS COULD READ. ALL KNOWN CASES PHOSPHATE
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POISONING IN THE EPISODE WERE WORKERS ACTUALLY HANDLING THE

PESTICIDES.

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